

General Debate on Ukraine, Thursday 22 September 2022

Briefing for Members of the House of Commons prepared by Protection Approaches

“President Putin’s statement on Wednesday morning signals dangerous escalation and desperation. This means the UK and its allies must prepare for – and seek to prevent – worse to come, both in Ukraine and in the wider region. The next stage of the crisis in Ukraine requires innovative and unwavering UK leadership to confront Russia’s escalation of its campaign of mass violence. Liz Truss was the first Foreign Secretary to identify atrocity prevention as a strategic interest for the United Kingdom as well as it being the morally right thing to do. As she returns from her first UN General Assembly as Prime Minister – during which she announced billions more for Ukraine and a new security review – I hope she will now bring these commitments together by making atrocity prevention a matter for the UK’s National Security Secretariat and truly centring the prevention of mass atrocities in the UK’s approach to Ukraine.”

Dr Kate Ferguson

Co-Executive Director, Protection Approaches

On Wednesday morning, President Putin, announced partial mobilisation of the Russian Federation and ramped up the threat of nuclear war. ‘This is not a bluff’, he said. We are at a deeply consequential inflection point for global rights and freedoms. Ukraine’s heroic advances against Russian forces are to be celebrated but as Putin and his forces become more desperate, they also become more dangerous; the likelihood of new and different forms of Russian atrocity crimes being committed against Ukrainian civilians and combatants have once again increased. These risks ripple across the whole region requiring urgent implementation of a comprehensive and preventative strategy. From Chechnya to Syria and Ukraine, the Russian government under Putin’s leadership has deliberately and systematically utilised war crimes and crimes against humanity to further its political objectives.

We make three recommendations to the UK Government:

- 1. Make atrocity prevention a matter for the National Security Secretariat in order to properly centre the challenge at the heart of British policy and strategy**
- 2. Resource the UK’s sanctions regime with the network analysis tools and expertise to secure behaviour and transaction change**
- 3. Match the promised increase defence spend with resources for diplomacy and development because the prevention of worse to come requires a fully joined up commitment**

The announcement by Number 10 on Wednesday, ahead of the Prime Minister’s speech in New York at the UN General Assembly, that the 2020 Integrated Review of Defence, Diplomacy and Development will be reviewed by Chief Foreign Policy Advisor, John Bew, is welcome. As Liz Truss said when she was Foreign Secretary, atrocity prevention is in the strategic interest of the United Kingdom as well as being the morally right thing to do. The refresh of the Integrated Review must build on its existing promise to prioritise atrocity prevention and in fact make it a central tenet of UK policy.

- 1. Make atrocity prevention a matter for the National Security Secretariat in order to properly centre the challenge at the heart of British policy and strategy**

Even beyond the extraordinary impact upon Ukraine and its people, the motivations driving, means implementing and opportunities enabling Russia’s Ukraine strategy will have serious immediate and longer-term implications for UK national security, European stability, and the very future of the international system. Number 10’s commitment to refresh the UK’s security and defence strategy must not only seek to *respond* to these threats but anticipate and seek to *prevent* them. Currently, despite recent attention from within the FCDO’s emerging Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM), the UK is not adequately equipped to identify or respond to the metastasising dynamics of Russian atrocity violence; determine possible points of leverage; or prepare for the future. HMG does not yet have policy on the distinct challenges posed by mass

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atrocities crimes, whether in Ukraine or elsewhere; it does not have the means of monitoring atrocity risks; it has no system for mapping architectures of atrocity violence. This gap in systems, expertise and policy has left the UK ill-prepared for the rapid, violent escalation of Russian strategy in Ukraine.

Atrocity prevention has been a core national security interest for the United States since 2011: the UK should do the same. In elevating the challenge to the National Security Council and making it a central consideration in the strategic review update, UK contributions to the prevention of and response to mass atrocity crimes in Ukraine, and elsewhere, will be buttressed by proper resource, intelligence, coordination, and political oversight.

2. Resource the UK's sanctions regime with the network analysis tools and expertise to secure behaviour and transaction change

The Russian architecture of violence is transnational, enabled by global and regional illicit financial flows, underpinned by organised crime and kleptocratic networks, supported by a spectrum of non-state and pseudo-non-state armed actors, and promoted by coordinated disinformation structures. When properly mapped out, this architecture holds considerable opportunity for sanction, leverage, and influence. The UK is not yet taking advantage of these fronts.

The UK currently lacks the capabilities to properly undertake this network analysis and so continues to miss these opportunities. While UK sanctions policy has been rapidly expanded, including through passing the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act and sanctions imposed on Russia by the US, EU, UK and other allies and partners around the world, UK sanctions are not yet targeting behaviour or transactional change; in other words: UK sanctions remain overwhelmingly punitive but are not preventative. Such system changes are cost effective, requiring only expertise and analytical capacity.

The UK's Ukraine policy must urgently prioritise the strategic tackling of illicit financial flows and the dismantling of supply chains with the goal of disrupting the Russian architecture of violence - not just punishing it.

3. Match the promised increase in defence spend with resources for diplomacy and development because the prevention of worse to come requires a fully joined up commitment

Announcement of a 3% of GDP increase of the UK's defence spend, in order to meet the threats posed by Russia and China, must be matched by increases for British diplomacy and overseas development aid. The prevention of worse to come requires a joined up leveraging of UK capabilities and expertise. Indeed, prevention of mass atrocity crimes always requires leadership from the local to the multilateral level, from civil society and from the diplomatic community. **If the UK wishes to be serious about confronting Putin's crimes and preventing those we can already see coming down the tracks, political leadership and resource investment must be made to diplomacy and aid.**

The freezing by the Treasury over the summer of 'non-essential' overseas development assistance has had immediate impact on the work of the FCDO, for UK partners delivering urgent support, and on programmes being implemented as part of the UK's 360-degree response to the complex and international consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These include worsening food shortages in the Horn of Africa, accelerating atrocity risks in Sudan, Ethiopia and the DRC. In the Western Balkans, knife-edge tensions are being stoked but funds for work that could help deescalate are now frozen. While Putin seeks first to destroy Ukraine as it currently exists, Russian strategy in Ukraine seeks to undermine the post-1945 system of rights; halting efforts to stem the dire impacts of this strategy not only risks undermining British leadership on Ukraine but also helps further Putin's own objectives. **If the UK wishes to respond effectively to the crisis in Ukraine, prioritise the prevention of further destabilisation – including mass atrocities – in the wider region, and address the global fallout of Russia's violence, the UK must immediately unfreeze ODA funds.**

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